Synthetic Marijuana -Spice or K2 - in Colorado

pg. 1 of 2

Synthetic Marijuana in Colorado Background

This fall, the health department learned about an unusually large increase in emergency department (ED) visits related to synthetic marijuana use across the Denver metro area and Colorado Springs. 263 ED visits were reported between Aug. 21st and Sept. 19th. Some were hospitalized or put in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Three deaths are being investigated as potentially linked.

Among patients in the initial chart review, the age range is 12-70 years old. 37 percent of reported patients are 20-29 years old; 24 percent are 12-19 years old; and 75 percent of the patients are male.¹



Synthetic marijuana is a mixture of dried herbs and spices sprayed with chemicals that, when smoked, create a high similar to THC, the main active ingredient in marijuana. "Spice" and "K2" are two popular names for these products.^{2,3}

How is it packaged and sold?

Synthetic marijuana is usually sold as dried leaves in a small bag. It is often labeled as incense, potpourri, or herbal smoking blend. It is sold in gas stations and convenience stores, under a variety of brand names including K2, Spice, Funky Monkey, Sexy Monkey, Dead Man Walking, Ten-X, Twilight, and Scooby Snax. Package labeling often warns consumers that it is not for human consumption.

Why do people smoke synthetic marijuana?

The drug is smoked to get high. It can't be detected by the standard urine drug tests. Since it was first sold legally at gas stations and convenience stores, it may be thought of as a legal or "safe" high.

What are the side effects?

Side effects may include elevated heart rates and blood pressure, drowsiness, agitation, hallucinations, seizures, tremors (shaking), vomiting, paranoia, loss of physical control, and comas.²

Who is most likely to use synthetic marijuana?

Most cases are among males, teens or young adults.







"Not Made For HUMAN Consumption"

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pg. 2 of 2

How many people are using synthetic marijuana?

Use of synthetic marijuana has increased significantly. Poison Center received 5,230 calls related to 'fake pot' in 2012. In 2011, 11% of US high school seniors reported using synthetic marijuana in the past year.⁴

Is it illegal?

In 2011, the Colorado State Legislature passed Senate Bill 11-134 which defines the term "synthetic cannabinoids" and specifies that synthetic cannabinoids are not to be considered medical marijuana under Colorado law.⁵ The bill created the following criminal offenses:

- class 2 misdemeanor of unlawfully using or possessing synthetic cannabinoids;
- class 5 felony of knowingly distributing, manufacturing, dispensing, selling, or cultivating synthetic cannibinoids; and
- class 4 felony of knowingly distributing, dispensing, or selling synthetic cannabinoids when the person distributes, dispenses, or sells to a minor under the age of 18 and the person is at least 18 years of age and at least two years older than the minor.

What if I have more questions?

Call the CO HELP Line at 1-877-462-2911 or 303-389-1687. Hours are Monday - Friday 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Saturday - Sunday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, visit www.cohelp.us.



The Colorado Health Emergency Line for Public Information (COHELP) is a public support service sponsored by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

In case of poisoning or chemical exposure, call the the Rocky Mountain Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222 and speak directly to a poison control specialist. If you are experiencing an emergency, please dial 911.



References:

- 1. www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/CDPHE-Main/CBON/1251590280071
- 2. www.poisoncentertampa.org/resources/1/substances/Spice-K2.pdf
- 3. www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/abuse/index.htm
- $4.\ www.monitoring the future.org/pubs/monographs/mtf-overview 2011.pdf$
- 5. www.leg.state.co.us

Why should you be concerned?

While most people smoke this for the "high of marijuana," synthetic marijuana can be up to 500x more potent.

Every package purchased is a mystery package. Each has a different amount of unknown chemicals.

Although synthetic marijuana has been federally banned, the manufacturers are steps ahead, so that when one chemical compound is banned, they are ready with a new one.



Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

This fact sheet was developed by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.